

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of)
Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of)
the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984) MB Docket No. 05-
311
as amended by the Cable Television Consumer)
Protection and Competition Act of 1992)

COMMENTS OF COMMUNITY TELEVISION OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

These Comments are filed by Community Television of Santa Cruz County in support of the comments filed by the Alliance for Community Media ("Alliance"), the Alliance for Communications Democracy, the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors ("NATOA"), and other national local government organizations. Like the Alliance, Community Television of Santa Cruz County believes that local governments can issue an appropriate local franchise for new entrants into the video services field on a timely basis, just as they have for established cable services providers. In support of this belief, we wish to inform the Commission about the benefits of cable franchising and the Public, Educational, and Government Access ("PEG") services in our community.

Cable Franchising in Our Community

Community Information

Santa Cruz County is a county with a population of over 250,000. Our franchised cable providers are Comcast and Charter Communications. Our community has negotiated cable franchises since the 1970s.

Our Current Franchise

Our current franchise began in 1991 and will expire in 2011.

Our Comcast Cable franchise agreement requires the cable operator to pay a franchise fee to Santa Cruz County in the amount of 5% of the cable operator's gross revenues in accordance with the Federal Cable Act. Of the 5% the County of Santa

Cruz collects per the franchise agreement, we receive capital support for PEG Access and other public interest services in the amount of \$1.01 per subscriber from Comcast and \$.64 per subscriber from Charter Communications which results in about \$700,000 per year in funding to Community Television for PEG access.

Our franchise requires the cable operator to provide up to four channel capacity for public, educational, and/or governmental ("PEG") access channels on the cable system. We are currently utilizing three of the four. On both the Charter and Comcast cable systems, we currently have 1 channel (or capacity) devoted to public access; 1 channel (or capacity) devoted to educational access; and 1 channel (or capacity) devoted to government access.

PEG Access Services

Community Television of Santa Cruz County has provided access services in our community for nearly 12 years. We operate 3 access channels. In our most recently completed fiscal year, Community Television of Santa Cruz County provided 706 hours of new original local programming to the cable subscribers. Below are the highlights of our services to the community.

- Community-produced television programming for special interests (such as - seniors, non-English-speaking, ethnic and cultural groups, youth, people with disabilities, advocacy groups, health care, etc.)
- Gavel-to-gavel coverage of local government meetings/hearings and other select "local" governmental proceedings.
- Staff-produced television programming on topics of interest to the local community. Last fiscal year Community Television of Santa Cruz County produced more than 115 hours of such programming on topics such as housing, transportation, water quality and the like.
- Media literacy and production training for neighborhood based community organizations and individuals.
- Video production courses.
- Video production facilities including studio, field, and editing.
- Satellite program reception and redistribution.

- Local political coverage, candidate platform statements and candidate debates during campaign season.
- Video bulletin board with text and graphics for community announcements.
- Distance learning: Programming delivered from community college and private institutions, facilitating distribution of for-credit instruction.
- Gavel-to-gavel coverage of educational governance proceedings.
- Production, support, and distribution for non-credit classes and job training.
- Distribution of community college and university educational programming.
- Unique non-local programming available via satellite feed such as Arts Showcase, UC Television and Free Speech Television.

The Franchising Process

Under the law, a cable franchise functions as a contract between the local government (operating as the local franchising authority) and the cable operator. Like other contracts, its terms are negotiated. Under the Federal Cable Act it is the statutory obligation of the local government to determine the community's cable-related needs and interests and to ensure that these are addressed in the franchising process – to the extent that is economically feasible. However derived (whether requested by the local government or offered by the cable operator), once the franchise is approved by both parties the provisions in the franchise agreement function as contractual obligations upon both parties.

Conclusions

This NPRM is only looking retrospectively at one aspect of the franchising process. We believe that the Commission must look to the future of the public's interest in telecommunication's services. The existing franchising process has provided a basis for public interest services appropriately tailored to each community's local needs. We believe that those services such as PEG should be required of all broadband telecommunications providers.

The local cable franchising process has functioned well in Santa Cruz County. As the above information indicates, we are experienced at working with cable providers, the local franchise authority, and community interests to both see that

the needs of the local community are met and to ensure that the practical business needs of cable providers are taken into account.

Local cable franchising ensures that local cable operators are allowed access to the rights of way in a fair and evenhanded manner, that other users of the rights of way are not unduly inconvenienced, and that uses of the rights of way, including maintenance and upgrade of facilities, are undertaken in a manner which is in accordance with local requirements. Local cable franchising also ensures that our local community's specific needs are met and that local customers are protected.

Local franchises can also ensure that the cable operator provides the PEG Access services which are responsive to the local community needs as determined through community needs assessments and the local knowledge of educators, local elected officials and local nonprofit organizations.

Local franchises thus provide a means for local government to appropriately oversee the operations of cable service providers in the public interest, and to ensure compliance with applicable laws. There is no need to create a new Federal bureaucracy in Washington to handle matters of primarily local interest.

Local franchises allow each community, including ours, to have a voice in how local cable systems will be implemented and what features (such as PEG access, institutional networks or local emergency alerts, etc.) will be available to meet local needs. These factors are equally present for new entrants as for existing users.

Community Television of Santa Cruz County therefore respectfully requests that the Commission take this opportunity to reaffirm the primacy of local government authority over franchising and should make clear that imposition on a new entrant of PEG Access, consumer protections and other public interest services requirements that are equivalent to those of the incumbent does not constitute an unreasonable refusal to award an additional competitive franchise within the meaning of federal law.

The PEG Access model should be strengthened and applied to new technologies, assuring that localism and community participation are not displaced by commercial interests.

The nation would be well served by a policy of "Community Reinvestment" through PEG Access that includes funds and bandwidth and/or spectrum that will be used for public purposes by:

1. Allowing the local community which owns the public rights-of-way to franchise and determine the best use of the community's property;
2. Dedicating ten percent of the public airwaves and capacity on communication facilities that occupy public rights-of-way to PEG use for free speech, diverse

points of view, local programs, community based education and political speech;

3. Mandating funding of five percent of gross revenues above and beyond any franchise fee to local authorities from all infrastructure and service providers and spectrum licensees to support PEG equipment, facilities, training and services; and,
4. Making PEG Access universally available to any consumer of advanced telecommunications services capable of full-motion video.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the members, Board and viewers of

Community Television of Santa Cruz County

Director

By: Maryanne Rehberg, Executive
816 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

cc: Alliance for Community Media, Getup@alliancecm.org